

Title of Topic: “The platform tomb of Firuz Khān during Jahāngir’s period at Agra: An empirical analysis”

Author Name: Dr SALIM JAVED AKHTAR,

Associate Professor (History), School of Law, GALGOTIAS UNIVERSITY, INDIA

Abstract: A variety of architectural monuments were built during Jahāngir’s period. Among the various structures, which have survived in the form of tombs are the most noteworthy. The tomb architecture of this period had a unique aspect in the form of a lofty platform on, which the actual (main) tomb stood. The present research paper seeks to study the salient features of a platform tomb during Jahāngir’s reign through a detailed survey of the tomb of Firuz Khān on the west of the Agra-Gwalior road at Agra. The tomb of Firuz Khān presently situated in the locality *Tāl-Firuz-Khān* in the locality of Madhunagar at Agra. This structure was initially identified by A.C.L. Carlleyle as the mausoleum of Firuz Khān¹ made of double-stories red sandstone.

Keywords: Architectural features of complex, Transition phase, Red sand-stone, Map, Plans and Plates etc.

Introduction: Firuz Khān is identified as the eunuch or *Khawāja-sarā*² of the palace to Akbar, who also built Firozabad³. Regarded as one of the trusted servants of Jahāngir, *Mansāb* of 600 *Zāt* and 150 *Sawār* is ascribed to Firuz Khān in *Tuzūk-i-Jahāngīrī*.⁴

Contents: It is generally held that the reign of Jahāngir was a period of ‘transition’ sandwiched between the reign of Akbar (the period of ‘birth’) and that of Shāhjahān (the period of ‘zenith’). Compressed between the monumentality of Humāyun’s Tomb, the *Bulānd Darwāzā* and the Tāj Mahal, the other buildings and structures dating from the period of Jahāngir were peripheral, lacking the centrality of design and innovation.⁵ Recent works, however, have seriously challenged this view and tried to place the reign of Jahāngir in its proper perspective regarding architectural developments.⁶

During Jahāngir’s Reign, many different tomb structures were experimented, and many ground plans were never used. Out of these new mentioned types of architecture, the tomb plans are flat-roof hypostyle halls with domed bays forming with the help of pillars.⁷ The tomb at Khusrau *Bāgh* in Allahabad is one example of this type of architecture that we start to see during this period. This also involves new kind of plan that is not normally seen to be restarted before Jahāngir reign. Ebba Koch named this type of plan as platform tombs (*takhtgāh*).⁸

In this paper, an attempt is made to make a detailed study of a *takhtgāh* tomb in Agra.

These tombs in their plan are based simply on a podium (*takht*). In most of these tombs, the building surrounding the graves is in the form of a podium (thus the term *takhtgāh*), which comprises vaulted bays or rooms within it. This design was initially inspired by simple structures comprising only a screen surrounding the deceased’s grave. The screen was known as *hizār* or *hazār*, which ultimately came to be identified as *hazirāh*. The earliest example of this *hazirā* was the tomb of Prophet of Islam in the Medina Mosque. However, by 11th Century A.D., the term acquired a specialized meaning and was extended to mean the ‘place of the grave’.

According to Lisa Golombek, by the 15th Century A.D., the term came to connote tombs formed by small rectangular platform enclosures. Under the Timurids, the term stood for funerary platforms, also known as *takht*, meaning an elevated place of repose for sleeping, sitting, or reclining. Thus, according to some Timurid sources, a high and spacious *takht* was built for the tomb of poet Jami who died in 1492 A.D.⁹ The term *suffāh* (dias) was also applied for such structures.¹⁰ A typical example of a *hazirāh* r

¹ A.C.L. Cunningham, “*Archaeological Survey of India Report for the year 1871-72*,” Vol. IV, pp. 188-189.

² Jahangir, *Tuzūk-i-Jahāngīrī* (1624), Ed., S. Ahmad, Ghazipur and Aligarh, 1863-64, p. 268. (Note: *Khawāja-sarā* work as a superintendent (officer-in-charge) of the royal *harām* (residence of the royal ladies).

³ E.T. Atkinson, “*Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of North-Western Provinces of India*”, Vol. VII, Farukhabad and Agra, Allahabad, 1884, p. 708.

⁴ Jahangir, *Tuzūk-i-Jahāngīrī* (1624), *ibid.*, p. 268; Saeed Ahmad Marahravi, “*Muraqqa-i-Akbarabad Yani Tarikh-i-Agra*”, Agra, 1931, pp. 195-197.

⁵ See for example the works of James Fergusson, “*History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*”, 2 Vols. New Delhi, reprint, 1972; Percy Brown, “*Indian Architecture (Islamic Period)*”, Bombay, 1981; Ram Nath, “*Some Aspects of Mughal Architecture*”, New Delhi, 1976; Ram Nath, “*History of Mughal Architecture*”, Vol. 2, New Delhi, 1982-85.

⁶ See for example Ebba Koch, “*Mughal Architecture an Outline of its History and Development*” (1526-1858), Munich, 1991.

⁷ “Barah Khamba” & “Chaunsath Khamba” in Delhi, “Solah Khamba” of Lucknow are all examples of Tombs of Salabat Khān at Agra. All these are the examples of new types of tomb architecture.

⁸ Ebba Koch, *op.cit.*, pp.72-76.

⁹ F. Saljuqi, *Khiyaban*, Kabul, 1964-65, pp. 88-89.

takhtgāh tomb under the Mughals is seen for the first time at Dholpur, where an octagonal platform over the grave of Sadiq Muhammad Khān Herāti was constructed sometime during the end of Akbar's reign. Just as in the early Timurid versions, the tomb of Sadiq Muhammad Khān is in the form of a simple funerary platform, which is octagonal in shape. The superstructure contains a second low platform surrounded by latticed screens (the *hazīrāh*) and pillared kiosks in the corners. A small kiosk with a stepped entrance leads to the second platform. (See **Plate's 1.2 & 1.4**)

Under Jahāngir's era, this plan is transformed into a full building type in which the main building or structure of the tomb takes the form of a platform or *takht*. Thus, we have variants of this plan at the 'Tomb of Maryam' near Akbar's tomb in Sikāndarā at Agra. The whole structure is a square 'platform' with octagonal kiosks and oblong cupolas at the corners of the superstructure. In the middle is a low platform with a replica of the grave. Jahāngir's tomb in Shahdara at Lahore is a grander version of this plan, with white marble pillars added to the four corners.

A distinct variation of this *takhtgāh* tomb can be discovered in the Firuz Khān *Khawājasāra*'s Tomb, a Jahāngirian noble who passed away in 1057 A.H./1647 A.D. during the reign of Shah Jahān.¹¹ As did many of his contemporaries, he also constructed his tomb during his lifetime, known after he called the Tāl-Firuz Khān, located close to the Agra-Gwalior Road. This pavilion like mausoleum is made of red sandstone and has an octagonal shape. (See **Plate 1.1**) Unlike the Sikandara's Tomb of Maryam or the Tomb at Dholpur, the super-structure has a smaller octagonal structure in the middle. (See **Plan 1**) The subsidiary octagonal storey, on the bottom floor, is where his real grave is located. (See **Plan 3**) On the main storey's southern and northern sides, four rectangular pillared cupolas form a *chauhāndis*, and on the top is a pyramidal roof. (See **plate 1.7**) These are protected by *chhajja* with bracket supports. (See **Plate's 1.5 & 1.6**)

This mausoleum's ground floor is made of an octagonal platform that is 13.10 Metres on either side. (See **Plate's 1.5 & 1.6**) The pavilion that houses the cenotaph is resting on top. (See **Plan 2**) A two-story entry gateway with 2.85 Metres wide aperture was constructed on eastern side of plinth to provide direct access to the pavilion level. (See **Plate's 1.2 & 1.3**) (See **Plan 1**)

However, the cenotaph is situated within the red sandstone octagonal pavilion, which is positioned in the middle of the octagonal plinth. A rectangular cupola on pavilion level on western side is now converted into a mosque. (See **Plate's 1.7 & 1.8**) (See **Plan 1**) Identical, four-pillared pavilions are built on the southern and northern sides with 3.45m×2.8m measurements. (See **Plate 1.7**)

This crypt is accessible from the south side within the plinth by a passageway 1.30m broad and 12.10m long. (See **Plate 1.9**) (See **Plan 3**) The sides of the building are both defined with three-closed arched recesses that were 1.17m in width, except the eastern side, which features the entry portal. (See **Plan 1**) The limited articulation makes it evident that the main building was intended to serve as a support structure for the pavilion-level buildings, which were to serve as the tomb's major tourist attractions. The largest of all the constructions is the entrance monumental gateway built on the pavilion's east side. It has two stories (double-storied), measuring 13.15m×4.45m with a height of 10.43m. (See **Plate 1.3**) (See **Plan 1**)

At the southeast and northeast corners, it had two *chattris* (kiosks), which are no longer survived. A wide staircase of thirteen steps ascends to the main platform from this entry gate. The roof of the gateway is accessible by two small stairs located on the south and north sides of the doorway. (See **Plate 1.4**) (See **Plan 1**) This portal's sides and façade are richly and dramatically carved with *chinhāna* patterns. On its corners are likewise four peacock birds. (Two red circle marks see **Plate 1.10**) The base of the central octagonal pavilion, 4.86 metres in height, is pierced with delicately carved screens which let light seep into a crypt below. It has sides that are 4.52 metres in length.

The pavilion is broken up by arched recesses 1.25 metres deep on all four sides. The interior, 3.15 metres on each side, octagonal chamber houses the cenotaph is accessible from south via stairs. This pavilion is an elegant architecture in articulation of the façade. In place of carvings covering the whole surface of the façade, only prominent architectural aspects like the spandrels and platform have exquisite carvings. The unusual usage of grey sandstone in addition to the red sandstone heightens the contrast between plain and ornamented surfaces. These contrasts draw attention to certain aspects, resulting in a degree of sophistication achieved by simplicity instead of excess. This pavilion surprisingly does not have any engravings.

This dome supports a very low-level drum. A few feet above the drum, it rapidly assumes a hemispherical form and has an extremely shallow profile. Indigenous in style are the intricately carved brackets and projecting overhangs (*chhajjas*). Above overhangs, every corner of an octagon-shaped structure is highlighted with a slender pinnacle of grey sandstone. (See **Plate 1.7**)

The mosque, which is relatively small, elegant and simple, is housed in the 5m× 3.15m pavilion on the western side. It has two supporting pillars and an open front. A single recess indicates the *mihrab* in the western stone wall. Ten *musallahs* (prayer locations) may be on the stone floor. High-quality grey sandstone was used to construct the two pavilions north and south. To support the overhangs, three brackets protruded from the wall. There are clear signs of glazed tiling in the brickwork above the overhangs, cornice, and frieze, which reveals an abundance of colours, including blue, green, yellow, and turquoise in the floral designs. These pavilions' pyramidal roofs seem to have originally been tiled, but only their impression and vestiges may be seen today. (See **Plate 1.7**)

Conclusion

Both portals and pavilions are covered with exquisite *chinhāna* panels with fine carvings of motifs like floral arabesques, confronted animals, wine carafes, and flowers. This building decoration style was typical to be seen in the Jahāngir's era and is

¹⁰ For a detailed history of these tombs see Lisa Golombek, "The Timurid Shrine at Gazur Gah", Occasional Paper 15, Toronto, 1969, pp. 100-124, especially pp. 100-109.

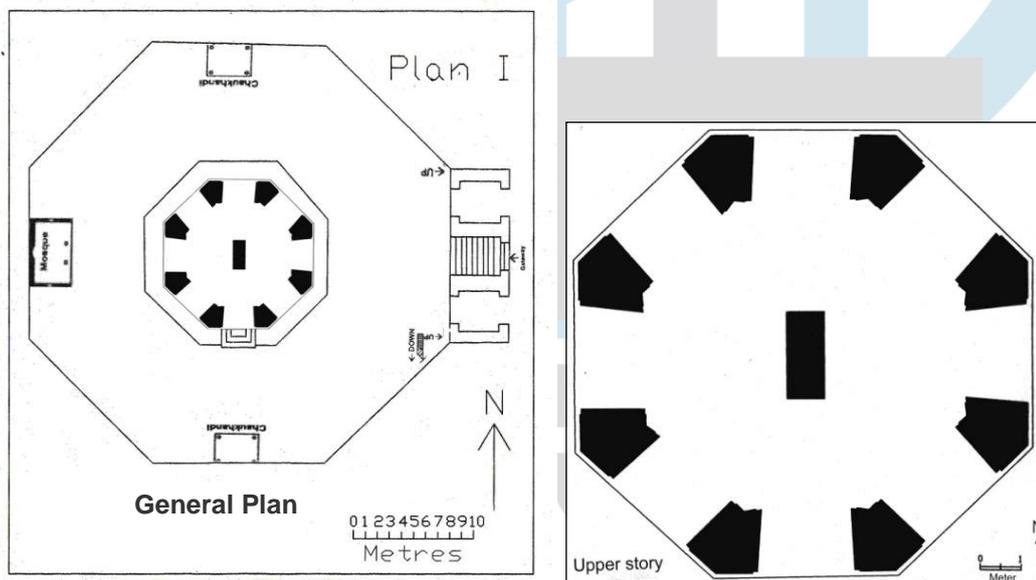
¹¹ Shahnawaz Khān, "Ma'asir ul Umara," ed. Maulvi Abdul Rahim, Calcutta, 1888, Vol. III, pp. 21-22; Abdu'l Hamid Lahori, "Badshahnamah", ed. by Maulavi Kabir-al-Din Ahmad & Abdu'l Rahim, Vol. I, A.S.B. (Bib. Ind.), Calcutta, 1867, p. 183, 365, 535; Abdu'l Hamid Lahori, Ibid., Vol. II, A.S.B. (Bib. Ind.), Calcutta, 1868, pp. 144, 183, 398, 724; Saeed Ahmad Marahravi, op. cit., p. 195.

similar to the designs found on “Akbar’s Tomb” situated in Sikandra, “Surajbhan-ka-Bagh”, “I’timad-ud-Daula tomb”, and other architectures and monuments built during his reign. The tomb is set behind a large water tank (*hauz*) located on its eastern side, which gives the tomb a form of paradisiacal and typical look.

All its features make Firuz Khān’s Tomb at Agra a beautiful example of the style of the tomb with Timurid origins but are unique to the time in which these were built. The ground plans were simple and enhanced with a sophisticated style that emerged during Jahāngir’s reign.

References:

1. A.C.L. Cunningham, “*Archaeological Survey of India Report for the year 1871-72*,” Vol. IV, pp. 188-189.
2. Jahangir, *Tuzūk-i-Jahāngīrī* (1624), Ed., S. Ahmad, Ghazipur and Aligarh, 1863-64, p. 268. (Note: *Khawāja-sarā* work as a superintendent (officer-in-charge) of the royal *harām* (residence of the royal ladies).
3. E.T. Atkinson, “*Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of North-Western Provinces of India*”, Vol. VII, Farukhabad and Agra, Allahabad, 1884, p. 708.
4. Jahangir, *Tuzūk-i-Jahāngīrī* (1624), *ibid.*, p. 268; Saeed Ahmad Marahravi, “*Muraqqa-i-Akbarabad Yani Tarikh-i-Agra*”, Agra, 1931, pp. 195-197.
5. See for example the works of James Fergusson, “*History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*”, 2 Vols. New Delhi, reprint, 1972; Percy Brown, “*Indian Architecture (Islamic Period)*”, Bombay, 1981; Ram Nath, “*Some Aspects of Mughal Architecture*”, New Delhi, 1976; Ram Nath, “*History of Mughal Architecture*”, Vol 2, New Delhi, 1982-85.
6. See for example Ebba Koch, “*Mughal Architecture an Outline of its History and Development*” (1526-1858), Munich, 1991.
7. “Barah Khamba” & “Chaunsath Khamba” in Delhi, “Solah Khamba” of Lucknow are all examples of Tombs of Salabat Khān at Agra. All these are the examples of new types of tomb architecture.
8. Ebba Koch, *op.cit.*, pp. 72-76.
9. F. Saljuqi, *Khiyaban*, Kabul, 1964-65, pp. 88-89.
10. For a detailed history of these tombs see Lisa Golombek, “*The Timurid Shrine at Gazur Gah*”, Occasional Paper 15, Toronto, 1969, pp. 100-124, especially pp. 100-109.
11. Shah Nawaz Khān, “*Ma’asir ul Umara*,” ed. Maulvi Abdul Rahim, Calcutta, 1888, Vol. III, pp. 21-22; Abdu’l Hamid Lahori, “*Badshahnamah*”, ed. by Maulavi Kabir-al-Din Ahmad & Abdu’l Rahim, Vol. I, A.S.B. (Bib. Ind.), Calcutta, 1867, p. 183, 365, 535; Abdu’l Hamid Lahori, *Ibid.*, Vol. II, A.S.B. (Bib. Ind.), Calcutta, 1868, pp. 144, 183, 398, 724; Saeed Ahmad Marahravi, *op. cit.*, p. 195.



Plan 1: General Plan of the Tomb

Plan 2: Upper story of the Tomb

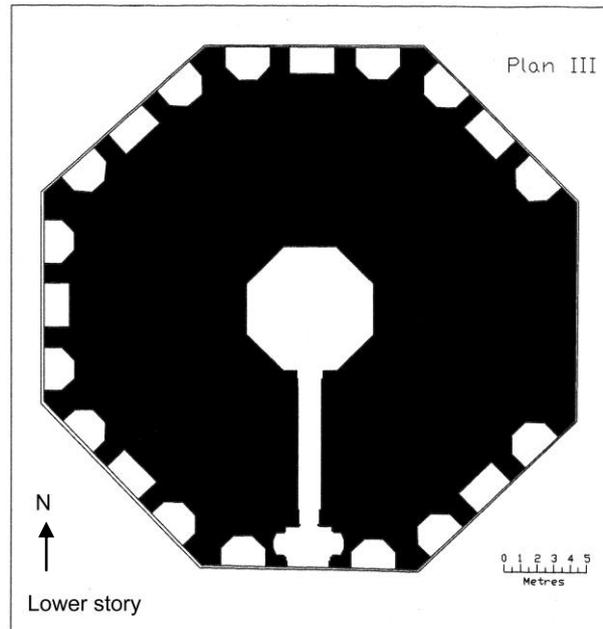


PLATE I

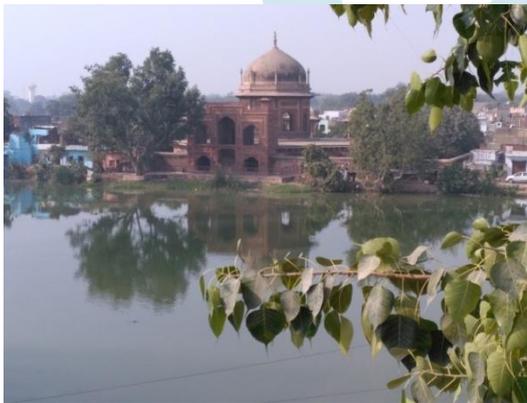


Plate 1.1: *Tāl-Firuz Khān* front view

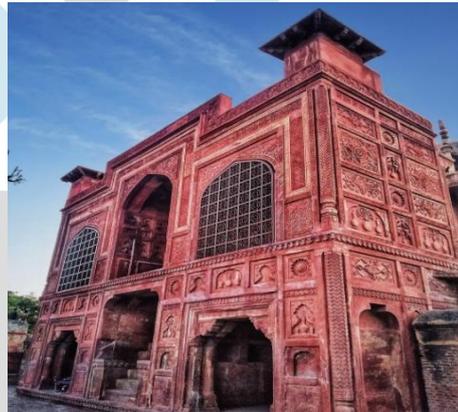


Plate 1.2: Monumental entrance gate



Plate 1.3: Front eastern view of main gate **Plate 1.4:** Small kiosks on entrance gate



Plate 1.5: Northern view of the Tomb **Plate 1.6:** Southern view of the Tomb

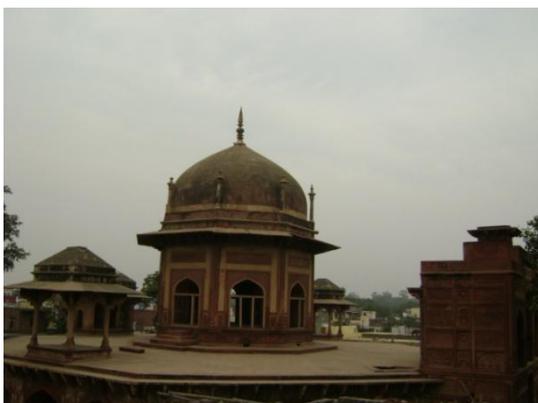


Plate 1.7: Tomb, Cupolas and Mosque view

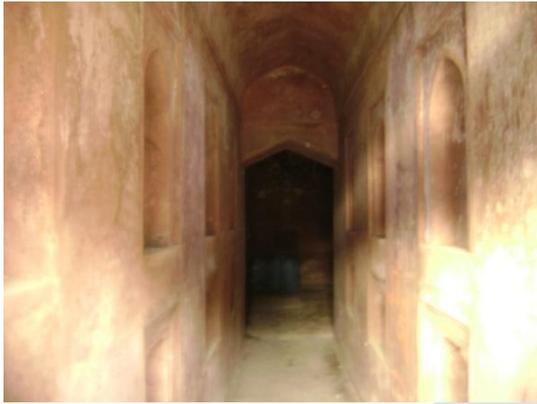


Plate 1.8: View of the Mosque



Plate 1.9: Southern side entrance passage

Plate 1.10: Southern entrance gate wall



Arial view of Tomb and Tāl-Firuz Khān at Agra